



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

September 13, 2005

News Release

IN FIRST CASE OF ITS KIND IN D.C., WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO OPERATING ILLEGAL MONEY TRANSFER FIRM THAT MOVED \$15.5 MILLION OVERSEAS

WASHINGTON, D.C. – United States Attorney Kenneth L. Wainstein and John P. Clark, Acting Assistant Secretary, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), announced today that Aissatou Pita Barry, 38, of Silver Spring, Maryland, pleaded guilty yesterday in the United States District Court to Operating and Unlicensed Money Transmitting Business, in violation of 18 U.S.C. Section 1960.

This case represents the first conviction in the District of Columbia under this federal statute. Barry is subject to up to five years of imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine or both, when she is sentenced by the Honorable Ricardo Urbina. During yesterday's plea proceedings, the defendant admitted that she incorporated Guinex International, Inc., in the District of Columbia, on August 16, 1999, with the stated purpose of transmitting money from the United States to various parts of the world.

Since its inception, Guinex has conducted transactions on behalf of approximately 5,000 customers. Between October 26, 2001, and November 15, 2004, Guinex conducted more than 65,000 transactions for its customers. During this time period, Guinex received deposits from its customers in the form of cash, personal and traveler's checks, money orders and wire transfers, totaling more than \$17 million. Guinex, in turn, transferred more than \$15.5 million via wires to various overseas locations, including Guinea, Gambia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Hong Kong, Singapore, China, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, India, England and France, for further distribution to individuals who had been designated by Guinex customers in the U.S.

Guinex generally charged a fee for its services of 10 percent of the total amount of money transferred. The defendant and other Guinex employees accepted cash and other deposits from customers at Guinex's office. Barry and other Guinex employees also provided customers with the numbers of various bank accounts controlled by the defendant and Guinex instructed customers that they could make deposits directly into those accounts. The defendant and other Guinex employees did not ask customers to provide any information about the source of the monies they were transmitting.

The defendant admitted that she violated 18 U.S.C. Section 1960 by failing to obtain a license to operate a money transmission business in the District of Columbia, as required by D.C. law, and by failing to register her business with the Secretary of the Treasury, as required by federal law.

In connection with her plea, the defendant also acknowledged that a total of \$273,627 seized by the government from various assets belonging to her and her company is property involved in, or is traceable to property involved in her operation of Guinex International Inc., as an unlicensed money transmitting business. The Court accordingly signed a preliminary order of forfeiture for those funds.

In announcing the guilty plea, United States Attorney Wainstein and Acting Assistant Secretary Clark commended the excellent work of the investigators in the case, particularly U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Special Agents David Papazian and Steven Soggin and Metropolitan Police Detective Phillip Robinson. They also commended Assistant United States Attorney Jeanne Hauch, Linda McKinney, and Angela Schmidt for their work on the case.

The arrest and conviction of Barry is the latest enforcement action in ICE's nationwide crackdown on unlicensed money transmittal businesses. The USA Patriot Act, which was signed into law in October 2001, enhanced ICE's ability to combat the international movement of illicit funds through money transmittal businesses by amending the 18 U.S.C. Section 1960 statute. As a result of the change in the law, money transmittal businesses in the United States must be registered with the Treasury Department and be licensed by appropriate state authorities.

Since the enactment of the USA Patriot Act in late 2001, ICE agents have aggressively targeted illegal money transmittal businesses and underground "hawalas" nationwide, given the vulnerabilities they pose. ICE investigations into unlicensed money service businesses have resulted in the arrest of 155 individuals, 142 criminal indictments and the seizure of some \$25.8 million since the Patriot Act became law.

ICE

ICE, the primary investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security, was established to bring a unified focus to the enforcement of U.S. immigration and customs laws, with the principal goal of preventing violations by terrorists and other criminals who threaten the nation's security.